

TOWN OF STOW
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
AND INDUSTRIAL COMMISSION

Minutes of the December 10, 2015 Economic Development and Industrial Commission Meeting

Members Present: Tom Farnsworth, Serena Howlett, Bob Collings, Andrew Bluestein and Rich Eckel

Associate Member: Celeste Versoi

Absent: Mannie Afonso and Kevin Whalen

Tom Farnsworth called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Meeting Minutes of October 22, 2015

Tom Farnsworth moved to accept the minutes of July 9, 2015

Bob Collings Seconded.

VOTED: (4-0) in favor (Tom Farnsworth, Bob Collings, Andrew Bleustein and Serena Howlett)

Sign Bylaw Review Update

Celest Versoi reported that she, Mannie Afonso and Ken Duvall have not yet met to review and discuss the sign bylaw.

Bob Collings said he feels Stow's bylaw may not be legal as it is in conflict with first amendment rights and "freedom of speech" laws. He also feels that the size restriction for directional signs (1 ½ square feet) is unreasonable. He feels that the bylaw should be plain and simple. Bob Collings also noted that the bylaw is not enforced.

Rich Eckel said the Commission should lean more on Ken Duvall because he does signs for a living and is very familiar with sign bylaws. The Commission should give Ken a clear idea of the objectives in what they are looking for from Ken, such as recommendations on what should and should not be included in the bylaw and what are the implications of First Amendment rights.

It was also noted that sign regulations are not consistent as to different uses. For example Agricultural signs are much more lenient than other signs. It was noted that the Commission should address signs for businesses, directional signs and consistency for all uses.

Business Table

Serena Howlett reviewed a draft business table she prepared to serve as a baseline report of business, commercial and industrial properties. She also included some Recreation-Conservation Zoned property on which a business use is conducted. Commission Members noted that the table will be very useful and can be updated as the status of properties change. Bob Collings suggested adding a column to identify any outstanding legal issues concerning a property.

Open Space and Recreation Plan

Karen noted that she previously distributed the Draft Open Space and Recreation Plan and asked if the Commission has any input. Bob Collings noted that the Town is currently 1/3 protected open space, 1/3 developed and 1/3 undeveloped. He is concerned that the tax rate is going up as it purchases more and more open space. He noted that the Town should attract big business in order

to bring in more revenue. It was noted that surrounding towns (Maynard, Hudson and Bolton) have a more non-residential tax base.

Karen will redistribute the Open Space Plan for Commission Members to review and comment.

Business Survey

Members discussed the business survey and agreed that a final report should be released. Staff will print out a final report for review at the next meeting.

Gleasondale Bridge

Karen Kelleher reported that MassDOT has deemed the Gleasondale Bridge to be unsafe and will be limiting it to one lane traffic.

Lower Village Hosmer House

Karen Kelleher reported that the owner of the Hosmer's Folly House inquired about the potential for Town's interest in the property. The owner conducted a tour of the property for representatives of the Planning Board, Community Preservation Committee, Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust and Historical Commission. Representatives of the committee's then met to discuss the tour and brainstorm potential uses for the property. Although most agreed that the property would be a great spot for a Stow Historic Museum, concern was raised about the cost to maintain the property and bring it up to ADA codes. Representatives then discussed a variety of potential uses to ensure its preservation and future marketability also with ideas for potential funding. Suggestions that were made and forwarded to the owner include:

- Investigate alternative uses. The Zoning Bylaw allows for uses otherwise not permitted in the business district on historic properties by Special Permit, provided that the historic buildings are preserved.
- Investigate the possibility for a National Historic Register Listing, which could open up significant subsidies for reuse, including Historic Preservation Tax credits. Members of the Historic Commission and others believe that Town would be willing to offer support of a Historic Register Application.
- Seek Community Preservation Act Funds (CPA) for the preservation/renovation of historic structures and/or preservation/construction of affordable housing.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:50 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Karen Kelleher, Town Planner